MARJORIE LIU

SANA TAKEDA

image

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MONSTRESS™

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THE STORY SO FAR...

Humans and Arcanics are locked in battle outside the walls of Ravenna, but inside, the conflicts are more personal. The Warlord of the Dawn Court has arrived, and in her wake has come Tuya – Baroness of the Last Dusk, wife of the Warlord, and oldest friend of Maika Halfwolf.

The Warlord was blindsided by revelations about Maika and Tuya's history of friendship, while Maika was finally forced to accept that the person she loves most in the world has been plotting against her all along. But this terrible family reunion has only just begun. With the help of her mother's necklace, Maika has summoned her grandmother, the Wolf Queen, to Ravenna – a move that is sure to displease everyone, including the Monstrum beneath Maika's skin.

THE PLAYERS...

MAIKA An Arcanic teen who survived the Great War, and slavery at the hands of the Cumaean witch nuns. Ruthless and haunted, she is determined to uncover the truth behind her mother's murder — and her mother's secrets — in the hope that she can free herself from an ancient and dangerous god called a Monstrum that is imprisoned inside her body and fills her with an otherworldly hunger for human flesh.

ZINN A mysterious, primordial Monstrum of tremendous power that shares Maika's body and mind, and fights her for control. Once considered a god, and drawn into this world by the Shaman-Empress, this Monstrum is driven by a deadly hunger, consuming the lives of humans and Arcanics alike, leaving only their desiccated corpses behind. Though it may give the impression that its only wish is to survive, there's far more to this creature, and its desires, than meets the eye…

KIPPA An Arcanic fox girl saved from slavery by Maika. Innocent and optimistic, she is frightened by the Monstrum — but trusts Maika and will bravely defend her and others by rushing into battles too dangerous for a child.

WARLORD: The Dawn Court's "Sword of the East," twin sister of Moriko Halfwolf, and Maika's aunt. Ruthless in her ambition, the Warlord's greatest desire is to unravel the mystery behind the destruction of Constantine. She believes the secrets of Constantine will protect the Arcanics in their impending war against the humans — but she does not realize that the answers she seeks lie within her young niece.

THE QUEEN OF WOLVES: Mother of Moriko and the Warlord, grandmother of Maika, and leader of the Dawn Court. The Wolf Queen is one of the most powerful Ancients, and she holds equally powerful secrets.

TUYA: Maika's closest friend in the world, who has been with her since before the Battle of Constantine. Unbeknownst to Maika, she is also the Baroness of the Last Dusk, a high-level member of the Arcanic Dusk Court tasked with containing — or even destroying — Maika's power.

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"LADY LO LIM...WHEN YOU SAID YOU HAD A WEAPON THAT WOULD SAVE MY TROOPS, I EXPECTED THAT WE'D BE ABLE TO USE IT *BEFORE* THE DEMONS BEGAN FIRING ON US.

"INSTEAD, THE FOREST IS BURNING, AND SO ARE MY SOLDIERS."

"COLONEL ANUWAT...A DEVICE OF THIS COMPLEXITY HAS TO BE ASSEMBLED WITH CARE...UNLESS YOU WISH FOR IT TO EXPLODE IN YOUR FACE."

RADIO SIGNALS ARE STILL JAMMED. WE HAVE NO WAY OF KNOWING WHEN THOSE OTHER DEMON SHIPS WE DETECTED WILL ARRIVE.

TELL THE OFFICERS TO CONTINUE REMOVING OUR TROOPS TOWARD THE BORDER WALL.

SURELY YOU'RE NOT PLANNING A RETREAT, COLONEL?

WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR RUMORED VOW TO NEVER SURRENDER?

THERE ARE NO ABSOLUTES IN BATTLE. WHEN A SITUATION CHANGES, THE WISE CHANGE, TOO.

AND THAT CANNON IS A BIT SMALL FOR THE DISPLAY OF POWER YOU'RE STILL PROMISING ME.

YOU DON'T REMEMBER...BUT WE'VE MET BEFORE.

SMALL, BUT DEADLY. MUCH LIKE YOU, YES?

AT SETHIHAR, DURING A FUNDRAISING GALA FOR THE ACADEMY. IT WAS ONLY IN PASSING.

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OF COURSE I DON'T RECALL THOSE DAYS. THE WAR DESTROYED FRIVOLITY.

BUT IT DIDN'T DESTROY EVERYTHING, DID IT?

WHAT IS ON YOUR MIND, COLONEL ANUWAT?

A MEMORY.

YOU SPENT THAT WHOLE EVENING WITH MORIKO HALFWOLF, WHO HAD COME TO FETCH HER DAUGHTER FROM THE ACADEMY.

I'M SURE YOU'RE MISTAKEN. I DON'T KNOW ANYONE BY THAT NAME.

PAH.

YOU'RE HERE BECAUSE MAIKA HALFWOLF IS IN RAVENNA.

THAT'S THE REASON I'M PULLING BACK MY TROOPS.

YOU DON'T GIVE A FUCK WHETHER WE LIVE OR DIE. SHE'S YOUR MISSION. THE ONLY THING I'M *NOT* CERTAIN OF IS *WHY.*

HEH... HEH HEH...

SHE'S MORE THAN A MISSION, COLONEL. SHE'S MY *LIFE.*

ARE YOU READY TO DESTROY ARCANIC AIRSHIPS, COLONEL?

THE PAST

"I ADMIT...I WAS NOT EXPECTING TO MEET YOU AGAIN LIKE THIS."

...BELOVED... DO NOT LEAVE US...

...WE NEED YOU...

ABOMINATIONS!

WE CANNOT LET THE CHILD LIVE.

"NOR AM I FOOLISH ENOUGH TO THINK WE CAN FORGET...OUR CONFLICTS."

SHE WILL DESTROY EVERYTHING.

THE PRESENT.

BUT I DO HOPE WE CAN PUT ASIDE HARD FEELINGS.

I'D LIKE TO THINK WE'VE BOTH CHANGED OVER THE YEARS.

THAT EXPERIENCE HAS GRANTED US...A HIGHER WISDOM.

WELL.

PERHAPS YOU'LL AT LEAST AGREE WE SHOULD NOT DRAG MAIKA INTO OUR PAST?

...WHICH PAST...

...THE ONE WHERE YOUR KIND...WERE STARVING AND BROKEN... LITTLE MORE... THAN WRECKED SCAVENGERS...

...THE PAST... WHERE YOU POSSESSED BODIES...NOT YOUR OWN...

...THE PAST... WHERE YOU ENSLAVED... MORTALS...AND TRANSPORTED THEM TO THIS WORLD --

-- ENOUGH, ZINN.

YOUR HYPOCRISY IS TEDIOUS. YOU, THE GREAT MURDERER... YOU AND YOUR SISTER-BROTHERS, LOST IN EXILE, DEVOURING EVERYTHING IN YOUR VILE PATH --

-- OH. HELLO, DEAR.

I THINK YOU TWO HAVE BEEN ALONE LONG ENOUGH.

TSK, GRANDDAUGHTER.

WHERE IS YOUR AUNT?

BLOWING UP THE FOREST OUTSIDE RAVENNA. FOR SOME REASON, SHE SEEMS... IRRITATED.

OH, YOU.

AND THE BARONESS? HAVE YOU HAD YOUR OWN... RECONCILIATION?

RECONCILE WHAT?

THE BARONESS IS A STRANGER TO ME.

HMMM.

PACK YOUR THINGS, GRANDDAUGHTER. WE'LL BE DEPARTING SOON.

I FELT YOU VIBRATING FROM THE OTHER SIDE OF THE TOWER.

I'M SURPRISED RAVENNA DIDN'T EXPLODE FROM THE TWO OF YOU BEING IN A ROOM TOGETHER.

...SHOULD I NOT...BE FURIOUS...?

...SHOULD I NOT...DESIRE VENGEANCE...?

...THE ANCIENTS IMPRISONED... MY KIND...

...THEN DID WORSE...TO THE BELOVED...

I KNOW. I CAUGHT A GLIMPSE, REMEMBER?

BUT ZINN... I SHARE HER BLOOD.

I NEED TO KNOW HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT THAT.

...YOU FEAR...I MIGHT PUNISH...?

MAYBE.

...CHILD...

...I AM NO... FOOL...

...I CANNOT AFFORD... REVENGE...

...I LACK FULL STRENGTH...AND YOUR MORTALITY...IS MY WEAKNESS...SHE COULD EASILY... KILL YOU...

...IF YOU DIE... I SLEEP...AND THAT CANNOT BE...

...NOT BEFORE...I REMEMBER...

YOU ALSO DON'T WANT TO RETURN TO MY FATHER.

...THAT WOULD BE... EXHAUSTING...

...YOU SHOULD HAVE WARNED... YOU WERE SUMMONING... THE WOLF...

...YOU CANNOT... TRUST HER...

MY MOTHER SAID THE SAME THING.

SHE ALSO SAID THAT WHEN BARGAINING WITH FAMILY...

...TRUST ONLY GETS IN THE WAY.

SIGH

GAK!

HSSSSS I DID WARN YOU.

NNGH!

WHAM

GET... OFF...

AAAAAHH!

THAT WILL DO.

SWISH

PANT PANT

WHY, CORVIN?

WHY WOULD YOU THROW AWAY YOUR LIFE...WHY WOULD YOU THROW AWAY THE HONOR OF YOUR FAMILY...FOR MAIKA HALFWOLF?

HAVE YOU ASKED *YOURSELF* THAT QUESTION, BARONESS?

YOU COULD HAVE KILLED THE HALFWOLF YEARS AGO, WHEN SHE WAS AT HER MOST VULNERABLE... HARVESTED HER BODY FOR THE DUSK COURT.

YOU, WHO WERE AT CONSTANTINE. YOU, WHO WITNESSED FIRSTHAND HOW HER BLOOD AWAKENED.

BUT YOU DIDN'T TELL A SOUL WHAT SHE DID. YOU PROTECTED HER, PRETENDED SHE WASN'T THE ONE.

THE QUESTION IS...WHY AREN'T YOU PROTECTING HER NOW?

SHE WON'T LIVE, CORVIN...NO MATTER WHAT WE DO. YOU KNOW WHAT THE ORACLES SAID.

THE BLOOD SERVES ONLY ONE MISTRESS, AND IT ISN'T HER.

IT'S A GOOD THING, THEN...THAT I PUT MY FAITH IN THE GODDESS AND NOT ORACLES.

...HEH...

YOU REALLY *HAVE* CHANGED... BROTHER.

MISS, IF YOU AND THE BARONESS WERE FRIENDS, WHY IS SHE TRYING TO HURT YOU?

WELL... YOU'VE BEEN ANGRY WITH ME BEFORE.

NOT LIKE THAT.

LITTLE FOX, REMEMBER WHO I WAS WHEN WE FIRST MET.

WHO I STILL AM.

YOU'RE THE FORGIVING TYPE...BUT NOT EVERYTHING CAN BE FORGIVEN.

TAKE THAT LETTER TO CORVIN.

STAY WITH HIM. DON'T FUCKING LEAVE HIS SIDE UNTIL I COME TO YOU.

IF YOU MAKE ME GO SEARCHING, YOU'LL BE WEARING YOUR *TAIL* AROUND YOUR *NECK.*

I ALMOST BELIEVE THAT, MISS.

BYE, MISTER MONSTER!

ENJOY YOUR BOOK!

...WHAT...A PECULIAR... CHILD...

...IF I EAT... *THIS ONE...* WOULD THE WOLF...MISS HER...?

...IT WOULD BE... SATISFYING...TO KILL...ONE OF HER CHILDREN...

WHY IS THAT MONSTROSITY GROWLING, WHELP?

IS IT ABOUT TO ATTACK AGAIN? AND WHY IS IT GROWING OUT OF YOUR BODY?

WELL?

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE DOGS?

WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?

MY MOTHER NEVER SPOKE OF HER CHILDHOOD... UNLESS IT WAS ABOUT YOU.

IT WAS A WAY OF KEEPING YOU CLOSE, I SUPPOSE.

SHE TOLD ME THAT WHEN YOU WERE SMALL, A CUMAEAN ENVOY ARRIVED, AND THERE WERE PUPPIES ON THE SHIP, FRESH BORN.

THE HUMAN SAILORS DIDN'T WANT THEM, DUMPED THEM IN THE WATERS OF THE PORT.

YOU HATED THAT.

SO YOU SET THEIR SHIP ON FIRE.

MORIKO... TOLD YOU THAT STORY?

THE PUPPIES DROWNED, OF COURSE.

ARCANICS DON'T KEEP DOGS.

YOU'RE THE WARLORD, AUNTIE. AND MORIKO IS DEAD.

YOU DON'T NEED TO KEEP REPEATING THE LIES YOU BOTH TOLD YOUR MOTHER.

HOW *DARE* YOU BE SO FAMILIAR WITH ME.

WE MIGHT BE RELATED BY BLOOD, BUT YOU'RE NO NIECE OF MINE. YOUR MOTHER ABANDONED THIS FAMILY.

I DON'T CARE WHAT THAT THING IS... OR HOW MUCH PROTECTION YOU'VE BEEN GRANTED BY THE WOLF QUEEN AND MY... THE BARONESS.

YOU *WILL* GIVE UP MORIKO'S SECRETS. YOU *WILL* TELL ME WHAT YOU KNOW OF THE WEAPON THAT DESTROYED CONSTANTINE.

AND IF YOU DENY ME, I WILL OBLITERATE YOU.

TO QUOTE A FRIEND OF MINE...

... *"THAT FALSE BRAVADO MUST GET VERY TIRING."*

TRUST ME, I KNOW. MY MOTHER ONCE COMPARED ME TO YOU, AND IT WAS NOT A COMPLIMENT.

THOUGH, IT WAS ALSO ONE OF THE QUALITIES MY MOTHER LOVED ABOUT YOU... IN MODERATION.

THAT IF YOU DIDN'T LIKE SOMETHING, YOU'D TRY TO CHANGE IT.

EVEN IF IT DIDN'T GO WELL FOR YOU.

ENOUGH. YOU WON'T... YOU CAN'T... DISTRACT ME --

MY MOTHER'S DEAD. YOUR SISTER'S DEAD.

AND WHAT I AM MAY BE A MYSTERY, BUT IT'S NOT MUCH OF A SECRET.

THAT IS AN OLD GOD. WE SHARE THE SAME BODY. IT'S A BLOOD INHERITANCE, AUNTIE.

AS MUCH AS YOU AND I ARE WOLVES, I'M SOMETHING ELSE, TOO.

YOU THINK I KNOW WHAT DESTROYED CONSTANTINE. AND I DO.

IT WAS ME, AUNTIE. I DESTROYED CONSTANTINE. ME AND THE OLD GOD, TOGETHER.

WE WERE HUNGRY.

BOOM!

BOMBS!

IMPOSSIBLE!

MY AIRSHIPS PUSHED THE FEDERATION FROM RAVENNA'S WALLS!

GODDESS.

NOT FAR ENOUGH, IT SEEMS.

KRAKADOOOM

OUR SHIPS ARE GOING UP LIKE PAPER.

TANNO...IT'S THE SAME WEAPON THAT DROVE US FROM THE LILIUM REFINERY.

CURSE THOSE WITCHES.

WZZZHHH

MASKS SECURE?

YES, MA'AM!

THEN AIM HIGH! WE NEED TO SEND THESE CANNISTERS OVER THE WALL!

BOOM!

BOOM!

RUN!

DON'T BREATHE THE AIR!

G-GODDESS --

KOFF *KOFF*

KOFF *KOFF*

GGRRR!

RRAWWRRRRR!

RRRRRR!

OH, DEAR.

OUR FLEET... UP IN FLAMES.

WHAT A TERRIBLE, UNEXPECTED... SHAME.

SNIFF SNIFF

THAT SMELL...

NNGH!

"MISTER CORVIN, IT'S JUST LIKE THE MADNESS IN PONTUS. BUT HOW?"

ARRRGH!

HOLD THE DOOR AGAINST THEM!

AIIEE!

CHOOM

CHOOM

CHOOM

CHOOM

"QUESTIONS LATER, KIPPA. I DON'T KNOW HOW MUCH TIME WE HAVE LEFT."

YOU'RE CERTAIN THE TUNNELS ARE CLEAR?

THE GREY RIDERS HAVE BEEN STANDING GUARD SINCE THE HALFWOLF ORDERED THEM REOPENED. NO FEDERATION TROOPS ARE NEARBY.

IT'S A NARROW WINDOW, BUT THE HUMANS MIGHT STILL BE DISTRACTED WITH THEIR ATTACK ON THE FLEET.

YOU AND I ARE LEAVING RAVENNA.

NOT WITHOUT MISS!

YES, WITHOUT HER. I GAVE MY WORD.

THE LADY HALFWOLF HAS BEEN SECRETLY ORGANIZING THIS EVACUATION FOR DAYS, IN CASE THE FEDERATION LAUNCHED ANOTHER ATTACK.

THE KIND OF ATTACK WE CAN'T DEFEND AGAINST --

BOOM!

WHAT MADNESS IS THIS?!

THE SAME FUCKING INSANITY THAT TOOK PONTUS.

SOMEONE WEAPONIZED IT.

SURELY NOT EVERYONE CAN BE AFFECTED?! WHERE ARE THE CIVILIAN TROOPS?

OCCUPIED WITH OTHER BUSINESS, IF WE'RE LUCKY.

LUCKY?! WE'RE TRAPPED HERE, WHELP! WE NEED THEM TO DEFEND THE CITY AND THE WOLF QUEEN!

...TASTE...FOUL... TAINTED...BY THE ESSENCE...OF A SISTER-BROTHER...

...I CANNOT EAT...TOO MANY...

...I MIGHT BE POISONED...AS I WAS...ON THE ISLE OF BONES...

ZINN...THE BLOOD FOX USED YOUR KIND AS A DRUG TO ENHANCE HIS POWERS --

WHERE'S THE WOLF --

RRYAAHH!!

MONSTER!

LOOKS LIKE YOU'RE GETTING THAT FIGHT, AFTER ALL.

TO BE CONTINUED...

A moment with **Professor Tam Tam,** former First Record-Keeper of the Is'hami Temple, and learned contemporary of Namron Black Claw...

"...FROM THE DARKNESS WE EMERGED, RESURRECTED INSIDE NEW SELVES WE COULD NOT HAVE DREAMED OF BECOMING...

...AND OUR ENEMIES, WHO THOUGHT US DEAD, WHO TRIED TO MURDER US WITH HATE, FLED FROM OUR REBIRTH, IN DESPAIR AT HAVING MADE US STRONGER..."

AN EXCERPT FROM THE JOURNALS OF ADARA FARCLAW, LITTLE ONES. I READ IT EVERY YEAR, AS A REMINDER OF WHAT RESILIENCE AND HOPE CAN GIVE US -- IF ONLY WE ARE PATIENT.

WINTER, AFTER ALL, DOES NOT LAST FOREVER. NOR DOES HARDSHIP, OR INJUSTICE.

THIS IS A TIME FOR RENEWAL...

...SPRING HAS ARRIVED.

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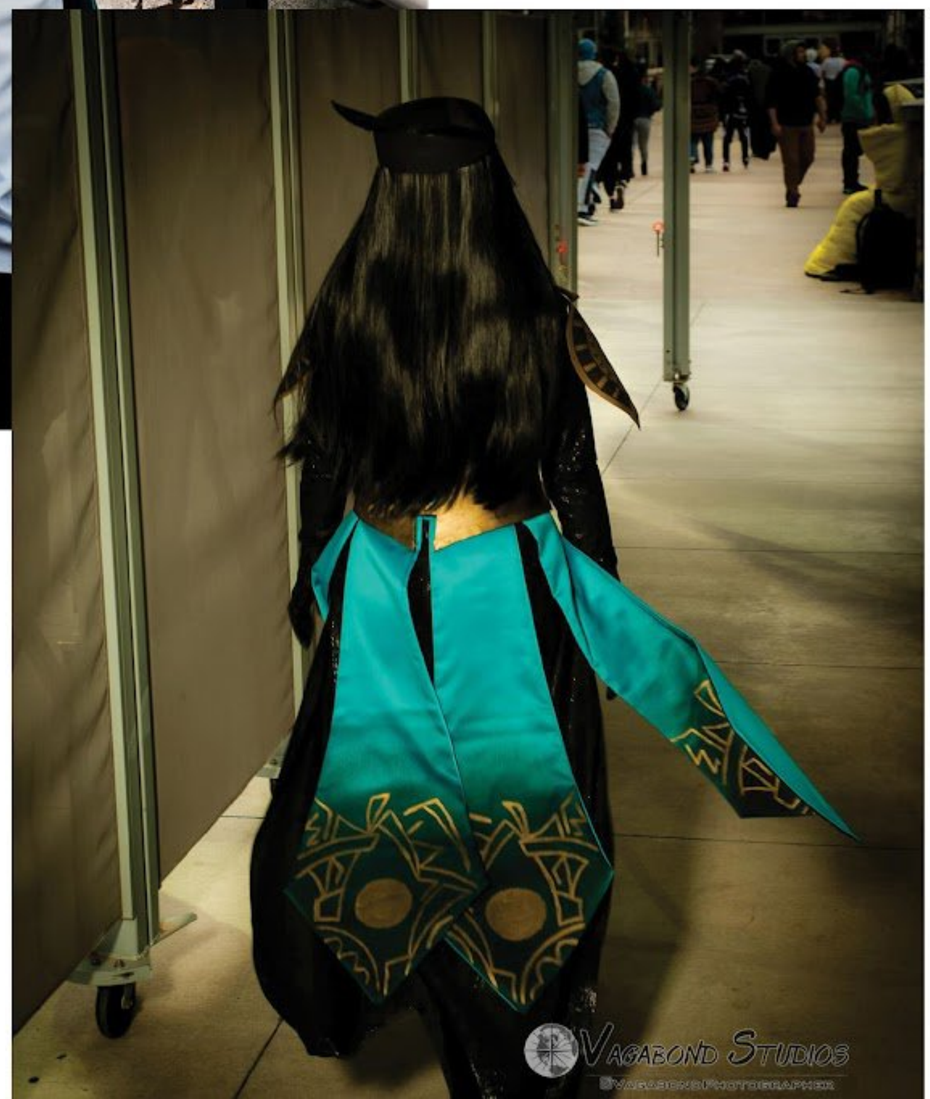

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NEXT ISSUE

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MONSTRESS™ ISSUE 33

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